

A LEAVITT ENTERPRISE

When the Town of Waterboro acquired what is known as the Taylor/Frey/Leavitt House, it also acquired a great deal of unwritten history of the town. One area of history not recorded but available through research at the house is that of the sewing of coats, pants, jackets, vests and shirts by women.

In the mid 1800's there were few opportunities for farm women to make any money. Some sold eggs, milk, butter, and cheese or bartered these items at the local store or shipped them to the city. One of the ways available to the women of Waterboro to make money was that of sewing. The Leavitt family moved to Waterboro from Alfred in the 1800's and built the house at Waterboro Center. I believe that the Leavitt store opposite the house, where the fire station is located, was owned and operated by the Leavitt's before they built the house. One of the enterprises that Benjamin and Alonzo Leavitt had at the store was buying cloth and piece work from clothiers in Boston, having the local women sew and press the coats, pants etc., then ship them back to Boston for "ready made."

The women were paid or were given credit at the store. Either method was advantageous to the women because it gave them either money to buy goods or credit to trade for commodities available at the store. Records from 1854 to 1866 are available at the house. These records include what was shipped from the clothiers in Boston and at what price. Also books that have an account for each of the women who did the sewing and pressing, how many items were made by each woman, and how much she was paid.

Between the years 1860 and 1866 there were at least 397 women involved in sewing and pressing. The following are the directions given by the Leavitts to the women.

TAKE NOTICE

To prevent misunderstandings and disappointments, with all who engage to make CLOTHING for the undersigned, I hereby give notice, that I shall, in all cases, require my work neatly and thoroughly done, in both sewing and pressing. Seams must be firmly and closely sewed; Stitching neatly done; Button Holes well worked; Buttons properly sewed and wound, and firmly stayed; and in all other cases where STAYS are necessary or required, or seams covered, it must be done in a workmanlike manner; and where Cord or Binding is used, great care must be taken in putting them on with neatness; and the whole garment, when finished, must show an air of neatness and good workmanship, as well as strength and durability.

If the work does not come up to the above standard, it will be deemed sufficient cause to refuse further supply. If by reason of sickness or any other cause the work cannot be made without delay, it must be returned unmade.

Be careful to put the TICKETS found in each bundle, on the garments comprising that bundle, otherwise it will cause confusion in the lots and sizes, and have them sewed on

neatly over the edge, but not take the stitches inside the border. On all COATS and VESTS they must be put on the COLLAR about one inch from the seam; on PANTS on the WAISTBAND near the back suspender button; on DRAWERS in the same place as the pants; on SHIRTS on the bosom plait; UNDER SHIRTS and FROCKS near the gusset of the side seam.

All work taken from me will be at the risk and expense of the party taking it, until returned.

When work is received by me it will undergo a close examination, and in all cases where it does not come up to the standard of work above described, it will be rejected and charged to the maker, or repaired at their expense, as may be for the interest of the undersigned.

COATS and JACKETS of all kinds, with the exception of DRESS and FROCK Coats, SACK and SACK FROCKS, when made of fine all wool cloth, should have a small hem turned round the bottom, and in felling the lining, which must be cut the right length, take the stitches deep enough to dent through and hold the hem in its place, except when directed to make them otherwise. No CORD or BINDING should be used on SACK POCKETS, but they should be bound in with cloth on both sides, except where they have a welt. Put a linen stay the whole length of the pocket-mouth and have it well barred at both ends. All pockets in the folds of FROCKS or FROCK SACKS must be stayed in like manner. The upper end of the pockets must be sewed and tacked at the top of the welt, and at least in two places across the seam. All basing threads should be taken out before returning work, including button-holes and pocket-mouths.

ALONZO LEAVITT

One of the women who did sewing for the Leavitts was my great great grandmother Clarissa Smith Carll from 1860 to 1866 she sewed 1047 pairs of pants and earned a total of \$168.67. This figures out to an average of 16 cents per pair of pants.

James Carll
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